

I also repeat what I said on an earlier occasion, that I ask—the Church must ask—for forgiveness from those who have been victims of child sexual abuse by clergy, and from their parents, siblings, and friends. Healing and reconciliation continue to be an essential but not easy goal, given the terrible effects that these sins and crimes can cause in the lives of victims, to whom the Church owes the deepest expression of sorrow and apology.

On a personal note I want to tell you that I have been a bishop now for almost 20 years and most of them have been overshadowed by the sin and scandal of sexual abuse and its devastating effect on victim survivors and their families, on the morale of our priests, and on the faith and even the practice of the faith, among the Catholic people, not to mention the general public. It is a cause of profound sorrow and of soul-searching for me that we bishops, the Church's pastors, have often failed to grasp the spiritual and moral devastation that results from sexual abuse, either in a misguided attempt to "save" an abuser's vocation or to shield the Church from scandal.

Whatever institutional worries present themselves to me as a bishop as a result of abuse, it takes only one personal meeting with a victim survivor for me to see that any institutional concerns are insignificant compared to the deep spiritual and psychological wounds and suffering that can and often do result from sexual abuse by a priest. Yes, the sacrament of priestly ordination is sacred and permanent, but I firmly believe, in the words of Pope St. John Paul early in the crisis that "there is no place in the priesthood and religious life for those who would harm the young." All the more so for bishops, several of whom have been identified as offenders and have been removed since 2002, notwithstanding the recent case of Theodore McCarrick, still under investigation.

In December I also mentioned the scheduling of Masses to be offered in reparation to God for the grievous sin of sexual abuse by clergy. As I said then, for a person of faith there can be no doubt that evil and sin call for remedies that are profoundly spiritual. In ordinary speech "reparation" means making amends to another person or persons for an offense or injustice committed against them. Inasmuch as an offense or injustice is sinful, it also demands that reparation be made to God. The schedule for the three Masses which will be celebrated in different areas of the Archdiocese can also be found on the website.

I have also directed our Office of Safe Environment and the Protection of Children to work with Catholic Charities to organize a support group for victims of clergy sexual abuse. This support group for victims and their families is meant to foster healing and recovery. Catholic Charities will also be training their clinical staff to become credentialed in the field of trauma and sexual abuse treatment, and will develop another support group for survivors of sexual abuse regardless of who the perpetrator was. Their specially trained clinicians will be available to both support groups. As horrific as clerical sexual abuse is, it only reflects a fraction of the cases of sexual abuse of minors in our country and in the world, and it is my hope that Catholic Charities can bring hope and healing to as many victims as possible.

The Archdiocese remains committed to a zero tolerance policy and the strictest of guidelines regarding Safe Environment and the Protection of Children and vulnerable adults, in keeping with the Charter and Norms that were adopted by the U.S. Bishops in 2002. This applies to every single individual who serves the Archdiocese, be they a member of the clergy, a religious, an employee or a volunteer, all of whom receive training and undergo background checks. I thank Kathleen Nowosadko, our Victim's Assistance Coordinator, and the staff of the Safe Environment Office, for their diligence and their profound commitment to protecting all of God's children.

*Archbishop Leonard P. Blair*